

WASHINGTON, DC - Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (MD) spoke on the House floor today in favor of the bipartisan Child Nutrition Bill, which the Senate has passed. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

"The Centers for Disease Control tell us that, over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates have tripled. Nearly one out of every five American children between the ages of six and 19 is obese. That doesn't just mean a lifetime of health problems for those children—it means a public health crisis that we all pay for. We pay for it in billions of dollars in health care costs each year. And we even pay for it in military readiness, with at least 9 million young adults too overweight to serve in our armed forces, according to a coalition of retired senior military leaders.

"We can't reverse the obesity epidemic or solve child hunger overnight. But we can take an important step toward getting our children healthier food by passing the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which does not add to the deficit. This legislation takes important steps to increase access to school meal programs, improve the standards of the food provided and sold to our children, and strengthen accountability to produce healthier results for our children.

"Among this bill's most important provisions, it increases reimbursements for school meal programs so that the food offered can meet today's health standards, not outdated guidelines laid down 15 years ago. The bill also helps schools create and expand breakfast programs, because nutritious breakfasts have been shown to correlate strongly with improved academic outcomes. When families face food insecurity, and when schools do too little to pick up the slack, we are condemning children to higher chances of poor performance in school and poor health throughout life. The bill would also provide grants and outreach to increase participation in summer food service programs, so that children can eat healthier food year-round. I learned about the importance of those programs first-hand when I met this summer with schoolchildren in La Plata, Maryland, who are benefitting from summer food service. Finally, this bill would continue school districts' role in creating local nutrition and physical activity programs—but it would also ensure follow-up to see that these programs are implemented and that they meet their goals.

"The health of our children has a direct impact on all of us—from the cost of our health care, to our economic competitiveness, and even to our security as a nation. That's why the Senate passed this bill unanimously. That's why it's supported by more than 1,350 education, industry, health, religious, and anti-hunger groups. I hope that my colleagues will join them in supporting this important bill."